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# Reading Liminal and Temporal Dimensionality in the Baxter Family ‘Public-Narrative’

**Abstract:** This inductive research explores the complex liminal and temporal dimensionality of storytelling in a family business context, uncovering alternative social constructions of family-business-stories as ‘Public-Narrative’ and ‘Business-Romance’. It develops theoretical insights, advancing our understanding of how narrative devices influence theories of family business. Developing a more nuanced understanding of where such stories sit within the overarching rubric of organizational-stories is central to expanding the theoretical knowledge base. Understanding such stories as generative scripts, help us author new entrepreneurial identities across generations. An analysis of the ‘Baxter Public-Narrative’ revealed viable, alternative themes and storylines particularly romance and adventure expanding available storied repertoires. The findings suggest that generational and intergenerational storylines change over time in a morphological manner with each successive generation.

## Introduction

Narrative, stories, storytelling and debates arising therefrom, particularly relating to entrepreneurial identity, are perennial and contemporary themes of interest in this journal (Mills & Pawson, 2011; Spedale & Watson, 2013; and Hytti et al 2016). Narrative based articles have appeared in journals across a broad spectrum of management studies including Morgan and Dennehy (1995); Stone (1998); and Barker, Rimler, Moreno and Kaplan (2004). Nevertheless, from a theoretical perspective, the study of entrepreneur-stories remains under developed, making narrative, stories and storytelling key concepts in this study. A story is a ‘narration’ of events containing basic features like setting, plot, characters, and a sequence of events in a logical manner with a beginning, middle and end. A ‘narrative,’ is an overarching organisational structure designed to facilitate the recounting sequential events and experiences. Although all stories are narratives, not all narratives are stories. Similarly, storytelling is a human ability to recount past events, whether fictional or non-fictional (McAdams, 2006). The terms are used interchangeably.

The literatures of entrepreneurship and family business are distinctive, yet separate domains of study. Our knowledge of both is built upon an understanding of entrepreneur-stories

which follow accepted scripts and storylines. From a theoretical perspective, this distinction between entrepreneurial, and family-business-stories, is pivotal because, although they can be categorised as separate genres, they are ‘interwoven narrative threads’. Scholars of both genres become fixated with the fairytale format of the ubiquitous first-generation-entrepreneur, and ‘founding-father’ storylines (Johansson, 2004; Smith, 2005; Smith & Anderson, 2005). Therefore, an opportunity is missed to tell (and learn from) alternative formats.

This study, explores an alternative narrative format – ‘Public-Narrative’ - to illustrate how it provides us with an enhanced understanding that cannot be gained from traditional formats. This exploration of alternative, storied social constructions, (ala Berger & Luckmann, 1967) illustrates how narrative devices can influence theories of business. Public-narratives are emotively charged leadership stories, which engage heart, head and hands as stories of self and family (Gantz, 2007). They are an art-form for turning values into action through crafting emotive, compelling stories enabling us to be the protagonist in our own life story, to author our own choices, and learn from the outcomes. They facilitate shared understanding by mobilising three key storied elements - challenge, choice, and outcomes. Thus, they contain a description of challenges faced, choices made, and outcomes experienced (Gantz, 2007).

The rationale for this research is that because narrative genres in business contexts remain under researched, we can learn from exploring alternative constructions (Gartner, 2010). This article, contributes, by addressing this gap in the literature, inductively exploring alternative business stories, to highlight potential emergent theory. The focus is not on social construction *per se*, but on narrative, and stories in developing theory. Thus, the aims are to 1) expand our theoretical understanding of the use of narrative and storytelling in business contexts; and 2) expand the existing theoretical base to include alternative, storied social constructions (McCollom, 1992) to complement the ubiquitous entrepreneur-story (Smith & Anderson, 2004). Developing a more nuanced understanding of where such stories sit within an

overarching narrative framework is important, because both genres share inter-related elements. If these are examined in isolation, similarities and diversities are missed. Moreover, one can use the other to analyse and ‘disturb’ traditional storylines of entrepreneurship.

This study interrogates temporal and liminal aspects of such stories because stories of, and about, family business reflect the day-to-day (liminal) processes by which relations between the family and business systems are created and sustained, via a system dynamic that reinforces the family's influence over the business (McCollum, 1992). Family businesses, have a unique relationship with time, offering genetic and cultural embodiments of ancestral heritage, a focus of dreams, plans and fears for the future (Drakopoulou Dodd, Jack & Anderson, 2013). Drakopoulou Dodd et al, emphasise the importance of ‘being in’ and ‘of time’ in relation to family business practice Consequentially, time influences temporal practices and processes enacted in every-day family business settings including story-telling, and brings liminality (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1974; La Shure, 2005) into play. Liminality relates to ambiguity and transition. For Turner “... *liminality represents the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions...*” (1974, p. 237). Entrepreneurship itself, is a performed liminal process, facilitated via narratives and storytelling (Anderson, 2005). Stories span the boundaries of space and time, and truth and fiction, via the liminality of entrepreneurial process. Engagement in the family business triggers a sense of occupying two dual worlds – the familial and the entrepreneurial. These exist at the boundaries of two storied worlds or liminal space - i.e. at a boundary between these two worlds, rather than inside both (Gulbrandsen, 2005). This status of liminality or “*in-between-ness*” facilitates the legitimate narration of contingent dual identities. Liminal processes bring about a ‘trajectory shift’ as they move, narratively speaking, from the past to the present, and then, an uncertain future (Henfridsson & Youngjin, 2013).

Temporal and time related aspects in family firms is of interest. Temporality is the state of existing within, or having some relationship with time and, from a philosophical perspective, pertains to the linear progression of past, present, and future. It can manifest as ‘narrative temporality’ (Ricoeur, 1985; Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje, 2004). As well as ordinary time, temporality and liminality, one must consider storytime/storied-time (Sharma, Salvato & Reay, 2014) and the sense of ‘time-less’ in spanning time and space. This triggers a tension (i.e. of time, but without time). This is important because family businesses are socially embedded within the wider entrepreneurial community (McKeever, Jack & Anderson, 2012). Context and community are important to storytelling in business settings and to ‘scripted’ socially constructed narratives, with established plots and storylines.

Moreover, this article contributes by engaging further with these topics and their relationship with ‘transgenerational entrepreneurship’ (Habbershon et al, 2010). Extant research (from a liminal perspective) into stories of, and about entrepreneurship and family-business, focuses very much on content, contingency and contextuality. The empirical element of this study relates to an analysis of the webpages of the family business ‘Baxter’s of Speyside’ and their public-narrative which illustrates how the two threads (entrepreneur and family-business-stories) interweave in a business saga crafted for public consumption. A close reading of the literature highlights gaps relating to story forms and practices in business. The review conceptually models cognate stories. The methodological framework of close reading and cultural web informs the analysis of the Baxter’s history pages. The analysis and discussion chart various roles, each individual actor in the story played, and articulates how these add layers of storied complexity. The article closes with implications for research into business-stories and the development of a theory by considering alternative narratives, such as romance and adventure stories, as viable alternatives.

## **Modelling and theorising the literature on business stories**

This review guides readers through contrasting literature and stories, aligning it with the key socio-organizational concepts of ordinary time vs liminality, to unpack the public-narrative. This is facilitated via a theoretical framework, drawn from precursors in the study of organizational narratives generally, and family-business-stories specifically, to help readers understand the research and the ensuing narrative explication. This is necessary because such stories are often based on classic, scripted entrepreneur-stories, which inform what stories can be, and are told (Smith & Anderson, 2005). Narrative theory and its relationship to storytelling is the main theoretical orientation of this study because theory and story are often interlinked. Both are process based, and stories help readers move from description to explanation (Pentland, 1999). Eisenhardt (1991) called for better theories and better stories, whilst acknowledging the existence of a trade-off between good stories and good constructs. From a pedagogical perspective, stories offer a practical alternative to theory, for example as practical theories, (Rae, 2004) which emerge from entrepreneurs' stories. These are implicit, intuitive, tacit, and situated resources of practice, whereas academic theory is abstract, generalised, explicit and provable. One must read theory from entrepreneur-stories. Corporate, entrepreneur and family-business-stories are part of the wider narrative of organisational stories and storytelling. Boje (1991 in Morgan & Dennehey, 1997: 497) defines an organizational story as *“a tale about a person caught in one situation unfolding from start to climax to resolution”*. Organizational storytelling is a recognised field in management studies, and the link between storytelling and success in corporate settings, is well established (Myrsiades, 1987).

## **Reading theory from entrepreneur-stories**

This study builds on previous works into the role of plots in portraying entrepreneurial stories, including Catano (2001); Down (2006); Smith (2014). Prior studies focus on storytypes and the nuances of entrepreneurial narrative (Smith & Anderson, 2004; Smith, 2005; Gartner, 2010) and on inspirational and fairytale elements. Entrepreneurs are storytellers, and storytelling is indispensable to entrepreneurs (Johansson, 2004; Mazzocchi, 2013). Yet, classic entrepreneur storylines are not the only contingent stories told (Hamilton, 2006; Smith, 2009).

The storybook entrepreneur who emerges is portrayed as a scripted, but flawed, post-modern hero (Smith & McElwee, 2011). This romanticised image shares little in common with the average business owner albeit, the heroic entrepreneur is socially constructed via collective processes of verbalization. This process disfigures the everyday reality of the enterprising, as heroic entrepreneur-stories become an iron cage suppressing the realities of 'entrepreneurship'.<sup>1</sup> Studies into the form and structure of entrepreneur-stories map out social constructions of the entrepreneur, highlighting different applications and settings, and how these shape the telling of such stories. Smith (2009) extended this process to examine how the entrepreneurial spirit can be perpetuated in family businesses, via a storied mentoring process arguing that such stories vary, depending upon the contingency relative to their narration. Entrepreneur-stories locate the heroic male in a particular 'narrative frame', but trap participants, in a restrictive environment and relationship whose basic architecture does not lend itself to family business settings. Nevertheless, entrepreneur-stories can be expressed via polyphonic narratives and polyphonic voices (Boje, 2008) providing tremendous scope for alternative forms of storying entrepreneurial experience, including family-business-stories.<sup>2</sup>

### **Reading theory from family-business-stories**

Storytelling in a family business context, is of theoretical interest (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012; Kammerlander et al, 2015; and Jaskiewicz, Combs & Rau, 2015). Stories and narrative frameworks are an integral part of family business and much of our knowledge of it comes to us via stories. Many family business articles touch upon storytelling (Hamilton, 2006; Dawson & Hjorth, 2012). For Wortman (1994) many articles were based on one-time experiences, arm-chair stories and familial folklore, thus hampering the progress of the literature. The *lore and lure* comes to us via the power of stories, and storytelling (Kaslow, 1993).<sup>3</sup> For Gibb Dyer (1988) the language, jargon, stories, and myths of family businesses, contribute to their very culture and continuity. Family-business-stories incorporate familial-life-stories (Miller, 2000). Alternative storytypes and storylines help us advance our understanding of how narrative devices influence family business theories (Gersick, 1997). Family-business-stories focus on individuals within the family and business, acting as generative scripts, authoring possible entrepreneurial stories/identities across generations.

Stories are one means by which family lore and history are passed on to successive generations, because one lifetime is not enough time to complete one's life's work – thus stories of individual and collective enterprise, possess the power of intergenerational influence (Hamilton, 2002). Stories abound within successful family businesses (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006) communicating their heritage across generations to gain competitive advantage. Families who tell and share stories, are more likely to perpetuate the family's heritage. Indeed, the link between the generation of wealth, family, family business, and storytelling, was articulated by Stanley (2001) who highlighted the importance of storytelling, to entrepreneurial families who share stories of business prosaically 'around the kitchen table', promulgating entrepreneurial education.

Family business can be interpreted as a 'continuing discourse' and families-in-business, draw from two, often contrasting, yet complimentary discursive narratives (Watson, 2010).



These, family and business, help them to speak about and make sense of themselves, and their world (Budge & Janoff, 1991). The interpretive perspective offered by narrative is appropriate for family business studies because it addresses multifaceted and complex social constructs performed by different actors in multiple contexts (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012). Family-business-stories are transformative, and are not just told, but enacted (Rae, 2004) spanning generations, following familial and business life cycles (Gersick, 1997; Pratt & Fiese, 2008; Habbershon, Nordqvist, & Zellweger, 2010). Narratives enable social boundary management for both individual and organizational identities (Knapp et al, 2013) including the corporate.

### **Reading theory from corporate-business-stories**

Many corporate stories are mature family-business-stories and companies turn to storytelling to leverage their human capital more effectively (McLellan, 2006: 17). Engaging in corporate storytelling is an effective public relations strategy, both internally and externally (Gill, 2011). Indeed, Hansen and Kahnweiler (1993) argue that storytelling provides a mechanism for better understanding the nuances and dynamics of corporate relationships. Corporate stories narrate a tale of cultural change, behavioral challenges and of control. They have various forms of composition; variants; story transformations, and the balance of tradition and change in story development. Storytelling is an effective management tool (Neuhauser, 1993) for communicating corporate reputation (Dowling, 2006), as well as being a generative script.

### **Synthesising the readings as generative scripts**

Observers often regard entrepreneur, family-business and corporate stories as separate entities, when they are patently cognate, cyclical, and prone to liminal transformation. From a reading

of the literature, *taken-for-granted* entrepreneur and family-business storytypes and storylines emerged, as detailed in table 1. These underpin the studies theoretical framework.

<b>Entrepreneur storytypes and storylines</b>	<b>Family business storytypes and storylines</b>
<i>Founding Stories, Poor-boy-made-good, Rags-to-Riches, Child Prodigy Stories</i> (Smith, 2006) and <i>Hardluck Tales</i> (Brandes, 1975).	<i>Founding Stories, Public narratives and Company Stories</i> (Smith, 2006).
<i>Maverick and Lone Wolf Stories, War Stories, and bad-boy entrepreneur stories</i> (Smith, 2006).	<i>Black-Sheep Stories</i> (Stone, 2004), <i>Family-War-Stories</i> (Davis, 1983); and <i>Family-Business-Feuds</i> (Gordon & Nicholson, 2010).
<i>1st generation-entrepreneur-stories/great-man-stories</i> (Smith, 2015).	<i>2nd generation-entrepreneur-stories/Great-Family-Stories</i> (Smith, 2015), <i>Familial Fable</i> (Smith, 2002), and <i>Stewardship Stories</i> (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007).
<i>Corporate Entrepreneur Stories, Tycoon Stories</i> (Smith, 2006).	<i>Corporate Family Business Stories</i> (Myrsiades, 1987; Neuhauser, 1993; <i>Dynastic Tales and Succession Stories</i> (Smith, 2006).
<i>Co-preneurial Tales</i> (Marshack, 1994; Poza & Messer, 2001; McAdam & Marlow, 2012).	<i>Fellowship-Tales</i> (Smith & Neergaard, 2015) and <i>Spousal Leadership Stories</i> (Poza & Messer, 2001).
<i>Mentorial Tales, Inspirational Tales</i> (Smith, 2006).	<i>Company Legends, Common Rituals and Ceremonies</i> (Gibb-Dyer, 1988).

**Table 1 – Common entrepreneur and family business storylines and storytypes.**

These accepted, socially constructed storylines, become fixed in time and in imaginations, as epic story elements, which resonate with us, and thereby perpetuate tradition and valued behaviours (Cunliffe, Helin & Luhman, 2014). There is considerable conceptual and theoretical crossover between these storytypes. The table documents expected elements used in storying social capital. The storytypes and storylines can be used individually, or collectively to position different types of narrative and the descriptive components that produce them, or used contingently, and their combination influences the stories told. Collectively, these form a self-perpetuating ‘virtuous circle of storied morality’ within business contexts (Smith, 2009). These are influenced by unfolding, collective family and personal stories allowing entrepreneurs and family members a conscious choice in how they narrate their exploits. These are not storied in a vacuum, but crafted to fit cultural expectations of what such stories should contain - albeit topic and content change across time.

From a theoretical perspective, we use and develop stories and narratives to transmit values and legacy (Randall & Martin, 2003). Family stories are based upon life course thesis

transmitted across time/generations (Pratt & Fiese, 2004). A temporal morphological process is evident, as first and second-generation stories merge in a process of “*Morphic Resonance*” (Sheldrake, 1988). Resonance is of importance because people like to hear stories that correspond to expected reality. Traditional entrepreneur-stories are emotionally resonant and correspond to such expectation (Downing, 2005). This also sets up “*Biographical Congruence*” (Wakeman, 2014) which spans liminality, via storytelling. Sheldrake (1988) suggests a morphological nature to intergenerational storytelling, whereby stories can, and must change (morph) across the generations, as different actors take up the reigns of the business, facing and overcoming new challenges. For (McAdams, 2006) generativity (and passing on legacies to future generations) are an adult's primary concern from mid-life onwards. Adults construct and generate self-defining life stories/narrative identities. Generativity relates to issues of *promoting* the development and well-being of future generations. Families engage in storytelling as part of this important societal venture, and highly generative adults construct life stories/narrative identities emphasising redemption. Adults know they will die one day, but their stories (legacies) will live on through their children and the family business. Thus, the generative teach their children to make amends for having benefited from childhood advantage and enhanced social status. Moral conflicts between power and love and future growth plans feature.

From a theoretical perspective, the use of narrative and storytelling as heuristic devices for better understanding business stories is justified, as it challenges traditional familial narrative constructions by exploring alternative, socially constructed, narratives. These challenge, *taken-for-granted* cultural assumptions about the form and structure of such narratives, and how they are told. Other relevant theoretical nuances include *Stewardship Theory* (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006) articulated via storytelling practices; and *aesthetics*. Aesthetics has explanatory theoretical power (e.g. aesthetics in organization studies is

becoming an interesting theoretical orientation – Strati, 1999). Indeed, an aesthetic understanding of business contexts, extends our knowledge of processes that shape organizational action. For Strati, organizational life is pervaded by aesthetics, emotions and senses, which are deeply subjective and influenced by culture and symbolism. Consequentially, new modes of inquiry (public-narrative) produce rich insights into organizational dynamics.

Conceptual Level	Applied Level	Theoretical Level
<b>Organisational Stories</b> Entrepreneur-stories (Individual & Collective). Family business-stories (Collective). Corporate-Stories (Collective).  These are fixed in liminal & temporal time as accepted storylines. Stories and narrative accommodate change more readily than philosophical stances and theories.	<b>Shared Epistemological, Ontological &amp; Axiological Storylines</b> Act as accepted, aesthetically pleasing, generative, socially constructed scripts. At this level, these storied aspects are more fluid and allow scope for new content and contexts and alternative narratives which extend, or challenge, accepted storylines.	<b>Theories versus Stories</b> Practical theories Public-narrative (Storied Social Capital)  Theories are stable and have longevity in terms of explanatory power. Theory surrounds us but people may not recognise this in everyday life.

**Figure 1 – A theoretically derived conceptual framework.**

As illustrated above, and deduced inductively from the literature, all three genres are subsumed within a wider organisational stories framework, but share similar epistemological, ontological and axiological elements framed as accepted, generative, socially constructed scripts, with similar contents operationalised in different contexts. All three are present in public-narratives. There are liminal and temporal aspects, as stories encompass place, time and generations, temporally spanning past, present and future, and of necessity, ‘morph’ over time into different formats and storylines. When analysed, the stories form (or inform) practical and academic theories. Narrative theory approaches help us better understand business stories as, a heuristic and epistemological sense-making device. The research questions formulated are:-

- What storylines and storytypes are discernible in the Baxter public-narrative?
- Do they conform to extant socially constructed story forms?
- Do they fit our extant theoretical understanding of such stories, and how they are used by the narrators of such stories?

These questions help interrogate actualised stories, to highlight different forms and storylines.

## Methodology

To address the research questions this study interrogates the case of the Baxter family to highlight emergent constructs situated in, and developed from, recognisable patterns and relationships between and within them (Eisenhart & Graebner, 2007). The constructs are, family-business-narratives and storytelling. The author first encountered the story on the history pages of their website ([www.baxters.com](http://www.baxters.com)) during his doctoral studies in 2004. Baxters' is a thriving fourth generation family business and a globally recognised brand. The analytical frame used is the 'Cultural Web' model of Johnson and Scholes, (1998) because family-business-stories narrate - rituals and routines, control systems, organisational structures, power structures and symbols, and tensions between them. Methodologically, the focus is on semiotics, and frames for analysing website data and photographs via cultural web thesis.

The Baxter public-narrative is told in generational epochs. To achieve 'Verstehen', these were subjected to content and narrative analysis to identify themes (Larty & Hamilton, 2011). From an authorial perspective, the choice to examine storied public data was taken because it was readily available, and appeared to have deeper ideological meaning, constructed by the Baxters. This meaning was discernible via *Close Reading* (Amernic & Craig, 2007) because the language and words used by CEOs, has communicational power, albeit open to qualitative interpretation. This is important because it could potentially influence the study's findings and implications, and because it injects criticality, instead of taking stories for *granted*.

The emphasis is on the analysis (semiotics and aesthetics) of the public-narrative. Semiotic analysis is central to the methodological framework (Chandler, 2001) as is the use of photo-elicitation technique (Harper, 2002) to support the narrative and bring the story to life.

Visual representations, such as photographs, enrich ethnography (Margolis, 1990). These permit the presentation of narrative data, (as images of family business) to augment and authenticate the unfolding. This allows observations to be made regarding emergent themes. An appreciation of the aesthetic element (Prall, 1936) emerged from readings, because presented images, may resonate with one reader, but fail to connect with others. Consequentially, this dual framework, captures the storied. aesthetic elements of the public-narrative, which is not a logical, ordered conventional chronological narrative. It presents the aesthetic elements as a novel form of thought, (Boylan & Johnson, 2010) allowing more deeply philosophical, narrative based understandings, to emerge. These are usually hidden from us by the structure and logic of crafted narratives, permitting us to escape from the logical empiricism of conventional entrepreneurship research, using the sociological perspective of 'lyrical sociology' (Abbott, 2007). Lyrical prose is heavily stylised, poetic and deeply descriptive, based on emotive reactions, and helps us understand it via the words of storytellers, enabling readers to 'feel' and 'understand' emotional engagement through words. The lyrics are embedded in engagement, location and time, and must be understood in this context. The subject matter is storied public data, authored for public consumption.

**Data collection and Analysis:** This study draws on several data sources - 1) The Baxter family business website/history pages; 2) a book chapter written by Gordon Baxter; 3) an informal conversation with Gordon and Ena Baxter; and 4) press coverage. The public-narrative was downloaded from the website and analysed (both narrative and imagery) using constant, comparative analysis. The Baxter family are intensely private and do not usually give interviews, actively controlling their own media output and family history. However, the author was privileged to talk with (the now late) Gordon and Ena at a networking event, where they explained that they viewed their story as a 'Business-Romance'. Staff at Baxters provided

feedback, actively helping construct, and make sense of their stories. However, the bulk of the data was accessed via the internet. All materials were printed for posterity, creating a 'press-clippings' file to protect their provenance, and origin. Several close readings were carried out and the theoretical and methodological frameworks applied, to analyse the data. The data was interpreted using qualitative data techniques, (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and key themes written up on post-it-notes before being coded and ordered. Emphasis was placed upon storied semiotic and aesthetic aspects. To aid analysis, these were presented as a photo-montage. A frame-by-frame semiotic analysis was conducted to establish what it contributed in terms of our understanding of inter/intra generational business stories. It was necessary to continually guard against the potential of bias, and of maintaining academic objectivity. When working with public-narratives, one must remain objective, and not inadvertently champion the stories and businesses analysed. Maintaining this balance to avoid becoming 'wrapped' in the romance of the narrative, and overly identify with them is essential. Failure to maintain objectivity, accentuates and distorts the narrative. The literature based theoretical framework helped in the interrogation of data, permitting descriptive categorisations of different stories, elicited from photographs/web site material. From this process, alternative storytypes including universal themes of 'Adventure' and 'Romance' emerged.

## **Presenting and analysing the public-narrative**

This section presents the public-narrative, as located at <http://www.baxters.co.uk>, initially, during the summer of 2004, and in 2014.<sup>4</sup> In commissioning the story on the website, they had the foresight to incorporate images and photographs from family archives, bringing the story engagingly to life. Collectively, the images contribute to its aesthetic appeal. On logging onto the website, readers are treated to a wholesome, colour coordinated (vibrant red) visage, of a

smiling Audrey Baxter, juxtaposed beside a plate of soup. The caption attributed to Audrey Baxter exclaims - “*In 1868, My Grandfather started out with mission ‘Be different, Be better’. Since then we have endeavoured to do just that*”. For analytic purposes, each webpage constitutes separate storyframes told in epochs, spanning four generations.

**Frame 1 - The Beginning:** This is a classic, idyllic entrepreneur-story. The opening lines narrate “*As the river Spey winds its way across the fertile lands of Moray, on the last stretch of its journey from the Grampian hills to the sea, it passes the village of Fochabers. Here, tucked away in the Highlands of Scotland and overlooking some of the finest salmon waters on earth, is the home of the Baxters Food Group*”. Liminaly, readers enter storytime, via a novelesque rendition, situating the company in time and place, in picture-book Scotland. Readers relive the heroic (founding-father) story of George Baxter, who rose from “*humble origins*”, as one of fifty gardeners at nearby Gordon Castle. George, “*was blessed with an abundant Spirit of Enterprise*”. He borrowed £100 from relatives, to open a small grocery store in Fochabers. His heroic agency is linked to serendipity (an entrepreneurial theme) and providence. The narration slips deeper into ‘heart-warming’ prose, extolling the fecundity of ‘*The Laich O’ Moray*’ as one of ‘mother-nature’s’ finest natural larders. From a liminal perspective, this sets the scene. Readers are told of an energetic George, bartering groceries for ingredients, and of wife Margaret, creating added value by making jams and jellies establishing a market niche and reputation, amongst the Gentry. Aesthetically, and narratively, readers are drawn into a well-crafted story of entrepreneurial flair and innovative creativity. The striking collage of supporting photographs, provides historical context, and includes a splendid pair of colour cameo images of flamboyant George and demure Margaret. They are typical, stern Victorian images. From a storytelling perspective, presenting the familial images of the couple is, both clever and inspired, because it creates a sense of family and unity. It is atypical, in relation to the ideal-typical presentation of 18<sup>th</sup> century entrepreneur-stories, as lone patriarchal figures.



The third photograph is of the wooden grocers' shop in Fochabers, with a handcart on display. The frame presents a typical entrepreneurial storyline of humble beginnings, and, from a liminal and storytelling perspective, readers are carried back in time to a value-laden place, cleverly linking family name to product, and their place in time.

**Frame 2 - 1914 to 1930s:** This frame tells a different, second-generation story of romance, continuing the adventure, through the epic story of George's son, William, and wife Ethel. In 1914, William married Ethel, bought land, and built a small factory. William and Ethel were an energetic couple. Ethel supervised the factory, whilst the peripatetic William, travelled the length and breadth of Scotland by train and cycle "*passionately advocating the quality of his wife's preserves*". Dutiful William wrote home each evening, detailing orders secured. Here readers are drawn, into a narration of family values. Serendipitously, William was approached by a greengrocer, having production problems with a batch of beetroot. William seized the opportunity, initiating the bestselling line of Baxters' beetroot. The year 1929, saw the now accomplished Ethel, innovating and making history by introducing Royal Game Soup. William apparently, inspired the 'award winning' soup by literally stumbling over a bag of venison at Aviemore Train Station. Readers have no way of verifying this inspirational story. Ethel pioneered the use of canning soft fruits, introduced a new range of jams, and the famous Baxters marmalade. She innovated, and he sold, together making a formidable team. They exuded unflagging energy and dedication. Ethel's personal heroism is immortalised in family history by the vignette that "*.. she was found making three tons of Blackcurrant jam just two days before the birth of her first son Gordon*". William conquered the London market selling to Harrods, Fortnum and Masons and other fabled emporia. He placed Ethel's humble fares into the '*Window-of-the-World*', establishing a global brand. Here, readers encounter entrepreneurial war-stories. The supporting photographs of William and Ethel, seated together, depict romance, and the images of Speyside, and game soup, authenticate the story.

**Frame 3 - 1939 to 1940:** Moving swiftly through time (real and storied), enter brothers, Gordon and Ian returned from the war, to take over the helm of a now struggling company of 11 employees. It tells of an epic struggle to overcome shortages, and of the pragmatic Ian adopting a scientific business approach; whilst Gordon exhibited a flair for selling, no doubt inherited from his father. In fairytale format the tale ends with Gordon as Managing Director holding the key to his father's desk (A symbolic, biblical key to the kingdom). The supporting black and white photographs are formal and posed, but depict friendly and smiling images of Gordon, Ena and Ian. They are classic examples of the austere grey suited business imagery of their time, but, collectively portray familial solidarity. The overriding message is of third-generation familial pride, tradition, conservatism and renewal.

**Frame 4 – 1950 to 1959:** The Romance continues with the love story of Gordon, and gifted artist wife Ena. They formed an extra-ordinary business partnership, working long hours (an entrepreneurial theme) in the laboratory, perfecting new recipes. Gordon conquered the American market honing his marketing skills, and returned bursting with new ideas, leading to fresh innovations and new products. The photographs depict the globetrotting Gordon, and Ena on television. The images exude nostalgia, romance and adventure, signifying togetherness at work and travel, by trading product and family name on the world market. Readers are sold a story of collective, familial entrepreneurship.

**Frame 5 – 1960s to 1970s:** Tells of expansion and succession, as the frenetic pace of the adventure continues, with Gordon frequently visiting the States, and Ena, the TV star and hostess of Scottish themed charity banquets. Together they grew the business and expanded exports. The photographs story life, stewardship, work, and product, incorporating factory workers into family. The images develop an appreciation of the products. The theme of hard work, links history to place, cleverly selling the rural idyll to the customer. Liminality and temporally, readers are moved from an appreciation of family to business values.

**Frame 6 – 1980s to 1990s:** Narrates ‘the appliance of science’, a relentless tale of expansion, introducing new vegetarian ranges, in keeping with taste and times. This charts the expansion of the team of food scientists, and the innovation of miniature jars of jam. Temporally, these shorter narrations, imbue the narrative with a sense of urgency and progress. Supporting images focus on Gordon, the factory and business expansion.

**Frame 7 – Baxter’s Today:** Tells a tale of familial, corporate entrepreneurship unfolding, as daughter Audrey is handed the reins by Gordon and Ena. We read of Audrey’s successful Banking career (City of London), situating her in the narrative as an equal, working alongside brother, Andrew. Together, they took Baxters into a new millennium, superintending the opening of the “*Best of Scotland*” shops; a £7 million riverside factory at Fochabers; the opening of a shop at Aberdeen Airport; and an expanding number of outlets, acquisitions and alliances. This story is narrated in a matter-of-fact manner which veils its breath-taking scale. Readers learn that Baxters continues to “*build on a commitment to quality*”. Images of Audrey and the expanding business shift the story inexorably into the future. Audrey is corporately dressed, and is juxtaposed by serious and conventional businessmen, in the form of father and brother (in corporate pose to depict continuity). Are we, as readers, being subliminally told that Audrey is different, (entrepreneurial perhaps) but is trusted because of family tradition? The photographs symbolise a union of old and new, presenting familial togetherness and pride.

From a liminal and temporal perspective, the frames move us quickly through past, present and future, whilst maintaining a storied authenticity. The frame-by-frame analysis and concentration on semiotics, permitted a deep analysis, helping develop a deeper set of concepts, such as values, relationships, languages, and discursive stories of action. This is a tale of inter-generational influence, narrated by adopting alternative generative scripts. The aesthetic dimension to the public-narrative adds a novel form of thought/thinking - demonstrating, such elements are hidden through the logic of crafted narratives, or the transmission of symbolic

artifacts. Obviously, because the stories were collected over, and told across, four generations, the themes encountered, are well rehearsed. Such stories have been told, re-told and crafted repeatedly, to accentuate the aesthetic dimension of the family values, and home-spun philosophies, embedded in, and perpetuated by them. That the stories emerged as romances, is no coincidence because the published version was set out for specific reasons and therefore the stories fit together to tell a compelling informative, entertaining story. This is of significance because when studying narratives, particularly organizational-stories, understanding the audience, and the context in which stories are told, is vital. Yet, because the story is unfolding the text lives in the boundary between what is made, and what is in the making (Cunliffe et al, 2014). That a story is crafted, is not a judgemental criticism, because all stories are crafted and the purpose of storytelling is to bring out multiple viewpoints (Boje, Luhman & Baack, 1999). This provides fascinating insights into the adoption, and adaption, of alternative genres of entrepreneur-stories. Familial pride and love metaphorically ‘ooze’ from the page. These are not generic (re-hashed) entrepreneurial ‘poor-boy-stories’, but stories of privilege, born of generations of family business ownership. It is no wonder the stories have resonance.

The photographic images play an important role in the aesthetics of the story and in legitimising it. Yet, just as we can have alternative readings of a text, we may encounter alternative ‘polysemic’ viewings of a photographic image (Boje, Rosile & Gardner, 2004). One would wonder if any story can be analysed out of context of time. It is only through being aware of the growth and corporatization of the company it is possible to analyse them as being ‘more corporate’. There is a danger in matching stories to interpret the photographs. The photographs were obviously selected by the Baxters to resonate with, and support their telling of the public-narrative. As readers, we accept photographic evidence as legitimate and authentic, in supporting the embedded community context of the storytelling in business situations (ala McKeever et al, 2012). By understanding this context readers make sense of the

material. Thus photographs, and their analysis, can authenticate an ethnographic approach, providing new insights by spanning liminality. Yet, photographs may be staged and crafted for the camera, to tell a 'particular' socially constructed story. This is important because readers may make unfounded observations and assumptions about visual forms. These narratives and images may resonate with those disenchanted with one-dimensional heroic entrepreneur-stories. Nevertheless, photographs help present narrative data, and tell an unfolding story fixing them as authentic (taken-for-granted) because they are presented publicly.

In immersing in the story, readers (re)turn to a simpler time when the narrative genre was of a more oral variety, hence the passion and power inherent in the stories. The story is resituated in liminal reference points, values, relationships and languages that suit the storytime in which the momentous narrative emerged. The public-narrative traces the epic rise of the family, narrating real life romances and adventures of couples in love with each other and business. This is no tale of cultural pessimism, but one of a slow, steady growth. Simultaneously, the story preserves the charm of bygone days, albeit generational and inter-generational storylines must change over time, with each successful generation of the business. As themes associated with storytypes and storylines change, they influence what type of entrepreneur-story the new generation can own and retell. As head-of-family Audrey is legitimised to speak authoritatively on their behalf.

In family businesses, everyday narrative often remains un-captured, because of its oral nature, and may remain trapped in organizational storytelling contexts (Boje, 1991). An understanding of such stories help us better understand the creation, transformation, maintenance, and transmission of symbolic artifacts of organizational culture (Johnson & Scholes, 1998). The analysis concentrated primarily on stories, rituals and routines, and symbols. The Baxter stories with their rich heritage of generational, intra-generational and inter-generational nuances are the gateway to/or portal through which readers access their

business philosophies. The stories are a mixture of prose and prosaics, of passion and poetics, romance and reality, and present lyrical stories, triggering an emotive awareness. Readers experience biographic congruence, born of shared cultural experience. The rituals and routines are familial, mirroring the seasons and familial life cycles, and the underlying motifs are of love, duty, pride, service, hard work romance, and the romance of travel. The analysis revealed that founding-stories, great-family-stories stewardship and corporate entrepreneur-stories are discernible. However, regenerating their generational stories, has become a ritualised routine for the family. The organizational and power structures of the family business have changed over the years and across generations, but the first three are characterised by strong patriarchs supported by dutiful and devoted matriarchs. In the fourth generation, the hard edges of the corporate narrative are softened by a dedicated matriarch and the message “*family prevails*”. Familial symbols remain unchanged, embedded in honouring the family hierarchy, and rooted in time and place in Fochabers, epitomising traditional Scottish Family Business and conservative business values. The late, Gordon Baxter wrote (in the first-person voice actively engaging in storytelling) that the bulk of the family lore was passed onto him by his father during bedside chats with him (Baxter & Weir, 1993, p. 252). Gordon reminisced of his ‘father’s stories’ of fifty years before, unfolding as the family history began to form new prosaic meaning to him. He felt present in the story and engaged with it.<sup>5</sup>

It was obvious that this was a very different story. The emergent storylines pointed towards a genre of ‘business-romance-stories’, expanding our repertoire of possible stories and how to view and theorise family business. These are reminiscent of fellowship-tales (Smith & Neergaard, 2015) where companionship, stewardship, familial service and duty, are integral. The storied context is important because context helps assess the significance of findings and the history of an individual firm, means little without it. Of interest, is the theme of spousal leadership (Poza & Messer, 2001), highlighting the prominence of women in the historical

snapshots - not just as dutiful wives, but fully contributing, heroic women, shaping family business history. Company history may define the family, but the stories of Margaret, Ethel, Ena and Audrey are atypical in terms of gender and time. The public-narrative is more than a gendered, copreneurial tale (Marshack, 1994; McAdam & Marlow, 2012). Baxter wives take equal weighting to their husbands - their exploits and shared achievements, are part of a continuing story. This author wonders if the narrative was specifically authored to emphasise and support Audrey, as a female successor, to legitimise her as an authentic heir to the legacy.

The emergence of the romance and adventure themes, answers RQ 1 and addresses RQ 2, by adding a new theoretical dimension. In answering RQ 3, it is evident that the stories do not always fit extant expectations of content, nor context. Instead, the narrators chose to tell their family-business-story via the storylines of romance and adventure, allowing the Baxters, as curators of their own stories, to exercise control over it. This demonstrates the power of stewardship theory development, via stories in helping craft the ensuing narrative to illustrate this. This post-modernist format helps us break out of 'narratives prison' (Boje, 2006, 2006a) and provides a counter hegemonic story (Boje et al, 1999) to traditional entrepreneur-stories. The public-narrative is not an antenarrative, nor an anaemic story (Boje et al, 2004). Instead, it is a polyphonic narrative, offering new voices (Kornberger, Clegg & Carter, 2006; Belova, King & Sliwa, 2008; and Letiche, 2010).

Deconstructing the story permits us to consider the role of images as liminal devices. It is evident that successive generations of the family were raised in an evolving moral framework, embedded in entrepreneurial family values. Their romances (and adventures) are moral scripts, and like classic entrepreneur-stories, are prone to elegy. The ancestral stories venerate entrepreneurial actions, the 'past', and 'the passed', whilst projecting the story into the future. They did not choose to tell dynastic-tales, but re-individuated, generational stories with a difference, allowing each new generation access to heroism. The inclusion of universal

narrative elements of romance and adventure, enhance the conceptual framework, pointing to the existence of a theory of Liminal Narrativity in Organisational Storytelling. Thus, narrative content, is dependent upon context, contingency, liminality and temporality, which necessitate that individual storylines change over time, to fit changing selves and circumstance as illustrated below: -

Conceptual Level	Applied Level	Theoretical Level
<b>Organisational Stories</b>  Whilst alternative storylines are new they remain so for a limited timeframe before liminally and temporally they become fixed in time as accepted storylines.	<b>Shared Epistemological, Ontological and Axiological Storylines</b>  Mediated by content, context, contingency, liminality and temporality. Over time these can change too as what is acceptable and accepted changes. Thus, they retain their fluidity remaining open to new content and contexts and alternative narratives.	<b>A Theory of Liminal Narrativity in Organizational Storytelling?</b>  Stories must change over time because theoretical perspectives, like stories, change over time to accommodate new understandings and knowledge of what is acceptable. Story and narrative change more rapidly than theories hence their value to academia.

**Figure 2 – The relationship between concepts and contexts.**

The Baxter public-narrative is a narrative of eternal, cyclical recurrence (Boje, 2006a). The importance of this study is that it illustrates that alternative storylines expand existing knowledge, but only remain alternative for a limited timeframe, before liminally and temporally, they become ‘fixed’ in time as accepted storylines. Public-narratives, such as this one, ‘fix’ the family story in time, whilst also highlighting and accentuating accepted philosophical aspects such as ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies, aesthetic and emotive elements. However, as articulated by Boje et al (2004), different narrative genres, have different ontologies and epistemologies too – so comparing stories is no simple task. Nevertheless, over time, new narratives and stories change the accepted public-narrative, as liminally and temporally, the family story changes to accommodate new content, contexts and alternative narratives. These in turn, influence new theoretical perspectives, making awareness of narrative, story and storytelling vital to us all.



## Conclusions

Stories told of, and by entrepreneurs, have cultural significance, being stories with a purpose, told to achieve legitimacy, or gain advantage (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Scholars, must be careful not to confuse this consolidated, public-narrative, with traditional stories that families-in-business, tell about themselves. By reading it as just that, a narrative crafted for public consumption, readers gain new insights. Narrative research in organizations is a fluid, dynamic, yet rigorous process, open to negotiated polyphonic interpretations by multiple participants, and is situated in time, place and context at the point of enactment (i.e. within the narratives and stories themselves and in the act of storytelling). Recognising this 'opens up' new ways of thinking about experience and sense-making, and helps narrators take reflexive responsibility for their stories (Cunliffe et al, 2004). This analysis of the Baxter public-narrative provides a vehicle for articulating, and illustrating additional insights into our knowledge and understanding, by highlighting the fixity and fluidity of polyphonic, narrative practices. It deals effectively with - change over time, and shifting power plays, as the language and discourse changes across the generations (Kornberger et al, 2006). The narrative challenges typical familial tales, and the analysis, and discussion, help us better understand the morphological nature of family-business-stories (Sheldrake, 1988). Business romances offer a welcome antidote to ubiquitous family misfortune stories (Brandes, 1975). This study demonstrates organizational-stories can, and do, change over time. The morphological nature of the stories told, re-invigorate the tale, as the first-generation-entrepreneur story gives way to the family-business-story, as an epic tale of romance and adventure, before manifesting as a familial corporate-story. Whilst the storied content may change across generations, the message, morals and storied moral, retain a sense of continuity (Wortman, 1974). Form and structure are not sacrosanct. This is important, because no existing theories highlight business-romance-stories, (or adventure) thereby offering a feasible explanation. Reframing family histories as romance,

permits an integrative narrative, and avoids the pitfalls of single-hero-stories. Liminality, and temporally, this links the micro-approach (individual), the meso-approach (organization) and a macro-approach (world-view) in a convincing, public-narrative, liminally bounded, in time and space. Whilst public-narratives honour and respect tradition, and provide historical meaning, allowing their authors creative licence to craft the family history from often diverse polyphonic sources, they exclude the *subaltern* voice (Letiche, 2010).

This article developed a more nuanced understanding of business-stories, to expand the organizational basis of the theoretical knowledge base, underpinning family business literature. Adopting the theoretical framework, helped interrogate the public-narrative, and in the understanding of how narrative devices influence theory development. The close readings led to this alternative understanding. An appreciation of the story helps narrators author and craft stories and explore alternative social constructs. The study highlighted the value and importance of storytelling to families-in-business; and how things are hidden through the logic of crafted public-narratives, illustrating the meaning of such stories, and how they ‘disturb’ traditional renditions, influencing temporal practices and timelessness. Ultimately the ‘Baxter’ story is a narrative for public consumption, and is an excellent example of a marketing tool, which gives the ‘Baxter’ brand, a distinctive persona! A check of local newspapers for publicly narrated stories of the ‘Baxters’ revealed that these parochial local newspapers were deferential in their coverage of the family, and lean towards ‘romancing’ family and company.<sup>6</sup> Frequent topics include tributes, eulogies, philanthropic acts, and Gordon, Ena and Audrey, as caring personalities. The Baxter Foundation, is singled out for praise, by helping the less fortunate in the community, and for sponsoring youth activities. Adverse publicity such as tragedy; personal-misfortune; health and safety breaches; and job losses, are treated sympathetically. Parochial journalism is obviously influenced by ‘local-hero’ and ‘poor-boy-made-good’ narratives. This is worthy of further study.

This fascinating discussion of a new social construction of business-stories, contributes to the literature by expanding our narrative understanding of cognate stories, offering a fresh perspective on generational approaches to family businesses. This expands our knowledge of the storied nature of family business, and adds to the repertoire of stories, and storylines, available to family members, to narrate their experiences and express new, storied, entrepreneurial identities. It expands the theoretical framework of business storytelling, but there are limitations, as it is based on an analysis of a single case, and requires further study to test and expand the model. Future work will develop alternative stories in different contexts.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Far from being an enchanting fairytale, they restrict our sensemaking abilities, leading to disenchantment. In this dislocated reality, entrepreneur-stories engender a sense of disenchantment in time and place, and even if presented as dubious stories of personal motivation, ignite and illuminate the possible.

<sup>2</sup> Polyphony is a textual strategy in the writing and rendition of stories, and a tool for analysing organizational power as discursive spaces where heterogeneous and multiple voices, engage in a contest for audibility.

<sup>3</sup> Family business consultants listen to, and understand family business in a storied format, dealing with family business stories, vignettes, and anecdotes told over time. Participants in family business seminars trade horror stories about the family business.

<sup>4</sup> The Baxter family take their story seriously, exercising pride in its narration. What started as a series of scrapbooks, photographs and personal diaries is contained in an archive. The website presents an unfolding, living narrative - a charming mixture of narrated nostalgia, and hard pragmatic commercialism, in which the Baxters sell, not just products but themselves, their history, their tradition, and storied future.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon recounts that this was the catalyst for his idea for the 'Baxter Visitor Centre' in Fochabers, offering a heritage experience, adding flavour, imagination and vision to make marketing more exciting and worthwhile. The emphasis on the aesthetic, the visual, the heritage of Speyside and place, delivers a memorable experience.

<sup>6</sup> *The Press & Journal* [Aberdeen], *The Northern Scot* [Elgin], and *The Forres Gazette* [Forres].